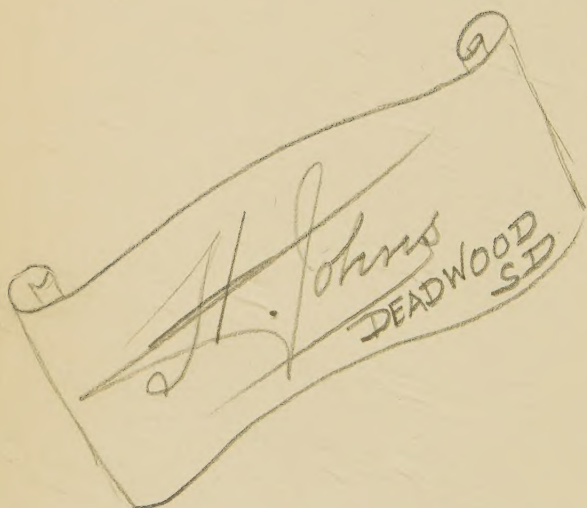


The Kingdom
of Light

George Record Peck



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THE KINGDOM OF LIGHT

BY
GEORGE RECORD PECK

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
The Knickerbocker Press

1907

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Originally published in *Putnam's Monthly* for
December, 1906

NOTE

THIRTEEN years ago, a few gentlemen living in or near Milwaukee visited Phantom Lake, in Waukesha County, Wisconsin, where beautiful lakes abound. Their day's outing proved so enjoyable that they have repeated it yearly ever since. Inevitably, a club was formed; and, notwithstanding the pressure for admission, its membership is still limited to fourteen. Death and removals have somewhat altered the personnel of the Phantom Club, but it remains substantially the same as it was in 1893. On their annual outing the members are in the habit of devoting an evening to

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exercises more or less literary in character; and by selecting the best ten or twelve of the papers read on these occasions, they have been able to make up, this year, a slender volume, which has been printed for private distribution only. In this collection the place of honour is deservedly given to the following informal address by George R. Peck, General Counsel of the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railway Company, who has recently retired from the presidency of the American Bar Association. So eloquent an appeal for consideration of the things of the mind and the spirit, comes with special force from the lips of a lawyer immersed in arduous professional labors.

THE EDITORS OF PUTNAM'S MONTHLY.
December, 1906.



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IT is a very beautiful custom which calls this club together each year in midsummer—the season when Nature is most generous with her ministrations. These are the days when, out of her illimitable store, she brings beauty and harmony to lives which are, perhaps unconsciously, becoming discordant and out of tune. Rest is some-

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thing more than the mere ceasing from toil; it is the emancipation of soul and body from care. It is not simply loafing, but loafing with an invitation to the soul, as was Walt Whitman's habit. These literary exercises, which we weave into hours of relaxation, serve to remind us that the world is waiting to receive us back, when our play-spell is over. It would, I suppose, be more in accordance with the current of events, and of ideas which are clamoring continually for expression in these modern days, if I should offer some reflec-

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tions on themes of immediate and pressing importance. Such themes there are; and by force of circumstances some of them have stared me in the face with a persistency not altogether agreeable. It is not because I underestimate them that I have chosen to ask you to rest for a little while in a serener air. The hungry problems of to-day will have their hearing without asking your permission or mine. The age is restless; it is self-assertive; it is pleased with the sound of its own voice, and confident in the strength of its own

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arm. And yet, there are doubts and misgivings in the minds of thoughtful men, who find themselves dumb to the questions they cannot help asking. When social and economic problems press upon us almost constantly; when the men of labour and the men of capital count themselves as belonging to separate classes, and neither trusts the other; when the mysteries of supply and demand, the prospect of coming crops, the outlook for trade, and the hazards of business are with men by night and by day, we may be sure that

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the highly artificial mechanism we call civilisation is liable almost any day to some painful dislocation.

But of these things it is not my purpose to speak. I allude to them, because, as it seems to me, every one must be sensible of their importance, and must feel that their shadow is never lifted, save for little intervals—and, may I not add, upon an occasion such as this?

Fellow Phantoms, it is probably not your habit to call yourselves philosophers, but nevertheless I

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suspect that each of you nurses a consoling belief that he is one. It is this opinion which gives to men of your age that little air of condescension, that tone of gentle patronage, as if to say, "See how much I know about life and its duties." But while you are listening to these sweet self-commendations, you might perhaps hear some unanointed outsider remark: "Yes, doubtless you are a philosopher ; but if you are so very wise, why have you so little to show for it?" Ah! that is the question. How many centuries is

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it since Plato was writing those immortal dialogues which have bewitched the minds of men from his age to ours, but leave us still struggling to make knowledge and conduct go hand in hand, and wisdom and character true reflections of each other? Nothing is so easy as to state sound ethical doctrines,—nothing so difficult as to live up to them. I suppose that more than half the literature in the world consists of good advice,—the rest is the story of many stumblings by the way, many mistakes, many failures, with here

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and there glimpses which leave
but little save the ever unsatisfied
inquiry—

Whither has fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the
dream?

Ah! if there were some method of
living by which we could keep the
glory and the dream, the problem
would be solved. When I think of
the mistakes you have probably
made, and of those I have certainly
made, I surrender the position of
philosopher and can only stammer,
with George Eliot's Theophrastus

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Such, "Dear blunderers, I am one of you."

Some of us will perhaps never be wiser than we are now. I wish I could be sure we shall never be less wise. Wisdom has a habit of her own; she lingers while the years speed onward toward our common destination.

It is not for me to enter the domain of religion, nor to trench upon ground occupied by men who have been specially called to the work. I speak only of the life that now is; how its highest compensations can be won, its rewards, if

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you please, attained; its sorrows mitigated, and its joys increased and multiplied.

And this is the lesson I would give: Dwell in the Kingdom of Light. And where is that kingdom? What are its boundaries? What cities are builded within it? What hills, and plains, and mountain slopes gladden the eyes of its possessors? Be patient, my fellow Phantoms. Do not hasten to search for it. It is here. The Kingdom of Light, like the Kingdom of God, is within you. And what do I mean by the Kingdom

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of Light? I mean that realm of which a quaint old poet sang those quaint old lines:

My mind to me a kingdom is,—
Such perfect joy therein I find,
As far exceeds all earthly bliss.

I mean that invisible commonwealth which outlives the storms of ages ; that state whose armaments are thoughts ; whose weapons are ideas ; whose trophies are the pages of the world's great masters.

The Kingdom of Light is the kingdom of the intellect, of the

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imagination, of the heart, of the spirit and the things of the spirit. And why, perhaps you are asking, do you make this appeal to us? How dare you intimate that we are not already dedicated to high purposes, and enrolled among those who stand for the nobler and better things of human life? Take it not unkindly if I tell you frankly that a little plainness of speech will not hurt even such as we. All experience has shown that it is at our age, or thereabouts, that men are most prone to grow weary. It is not in the morning of the march,

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but in the afternoon, that soldiers find it most difficult to keep step with the column that follows the colours.

I have appealed to you for what I have called the intellectual life. By the intellectual life I mean that course of living which recognises always and without ceasing the infinite value of the mind; which gives to its cultivation and to its enlargement a constant and enduring devotion; and which clings to it in good and in evil days with a growing and abiding love.

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The Kingdom of Light is open to all who *seek* the light. This may appear a mere truism, since every one admits the superiority of the mental over the physical nature. But that is where the danger lies. All admit it; but how few act upon it! How many men and women do you know who after they have, as the phrase goes, finished their education, ever give a serious thought to their mental growth? They have no time; no time to live, but only to exist. Do not misunderstand me. I do not expect, nor do I think it possible,

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that the great majority of people can make intellectual improvement their first or only aim. God's wisdom has made the law that man must dig and delve, must work with his hands and bend his back to the burden that is laid upon it. We must have bread; but how inexpressibly foolish it is to suppose we can live by bread alone.

Granting all that can be claimed for lack of time, for the food and clothing to be bought, and the debts to be paid, the truth remains—and I beg you to remember it,—

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the person who allows his mental and spiritual nature to stagnate and decay does so not for want of time, but for want of inclination. The farm, the shop, and the office are not such hard masters as we imagine. We yield too easily to their sway, and set them up as rulers when they ought to be only servants. There is no vocation—absolutely none—that cuts off entirely the opportunities for intellectual development. The Kingdom of Light is an especially delightful home for him whose purse is not of

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sufficient weight to provide a home elsewhere, and a humble cottage in the Kingdom can be made to shine with a brightness above palace walls. For my part I would rather have been Charles Lamb than the Duke of Wellington, and his influence in the world is incalculably the greater of the two. And yet he was but a clerk in the India House, poor in pocket, but rich beyond measure in his very poverty, whose jewels are not in the goldsmith's list. The problem of life is to rightly adjust the prose to the

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poetry, the sordid to the spiritual, the common and selfish to the high and beneficent, forgetting not that these last are incomparably the more precious.

Modern life is a startling contradiction. Never were colleges so numerous, so prosperous, so richly endowed as now. Never were public schools so well conducted, or so largely patronised. But yet, what Carlyle perhaps too bitterly calls "the mechanical spirit of the age" is upon us. The commercial spirit, too, is with us, holding its head so high that

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timid souls are frightened at its pretensions. It is the scholar's duty to set his face resolutely against both.

I can never be the apostle of despair. The colours in the morning and the evening sky are brilliant yet. But I fear the scholar is not the force he once was, and will again be when the twentieth century gets through its carnival of invention and construction. We have culture; what we need is the love of culture. We have knowledge; but our prayer should be, "Give us the love of knowledge."

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I may be wrong, but I sometimes wish Nature would be more stingy of her secrets. She has given them out with so lavish a hand that some men think the greatest thing in the world is to persuade her to work in some newly invented harness. Edison and the other wizards of science have almost succeeded in making life automatic. Its chord is set to a minor key. Plain living and high thinking, that once went together, are transformed into high living and very plain thinking. The old-time simplicity of manners, the modest

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tastes of our fathers, have given way to the clang and clash, the noise and turbulence, that characterise the age. We know too much--and too little. We know the law of evolution; but who can tell us when, or how, or why it came to be the law? We accept it as a great scientific truth, and as such it should be welcomed. But life has lost something of its zest, some of the glory that used to be in it, since we were told that mind is only an emanation of matter, a force or principle mechanically produced by molecular motion within the brain.

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When the telephone burst upon us a few years ago, the world was delighted and amazed. And yet we were not needing telephones half as much as we were needing men; men who, by living above the common level, should exalt and dignify human life. I sometimes think it would be wise to close the Patent Office in Washington, and to say to the tired brains of the inventors, "Rest, and be refreshed." We hurry on to new devices which shall be ears to the deaf, and eyes to the blind, and feet to the halt; but meantime the

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poems are unwritten, and hearts that are longing for one strain of the music they used to hear are told to be satisfied with the great achievements of the past century. The wisest of the Greeks taught that the ideal is the only true real ; and Emerson, our American seer, who sent forth from Concord his inspiring oracles, taught the same. I may be wrong, but I cannot help thinking that neither here nor hereafter does salvation lie in wheat, or corn, or iron.

Again I must plead that you

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take my words as I mean them. I do not preach a gospel of mere sentiment, nor of inane, impracticable dilettanteism. The Lord put it in my way to learn long ago that we cannot eat poetry, or art, or sunbeams. And yet I hold it true, now and always, that life without these things is shorn of more than half its value. The ox and his master differ little in dignity if neither rises above the level of the stomach or the manger.

The highest use of the mind is not mere logic, the almost mechanical function of drawing conclu-

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sions from facts. Even lawyers do that; and so, also, to some extent, as naturalists tell us, do the horse and the dog. The human intellect is best used when its possessor suffers it to reach out beyond its own environment into the realm where God has placed truth and beauty and the influences that make for righteousness. There is no such thing as a common or humdrum life, unless we make it so ourselves. The rainbow and the rose will give their colours to all alike. The sense of beauty that is born in every soul pleads for per-

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mission to remain there. Cast it out, and not all the cunning of an Edison can replace it.

It is the imagination, or perhaps I should say the imaginative faculty, that most largely separates man from the lower animals, and that also divides the higher from the lower order of men. We all respect the multiplication table, and find in it about the only platform upon which we can agree to stand; but he would be a curiously incomplete man to whose soul it would bring the rapture that comes from reading *Hamlet* or

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In Memoriam. The thoughts that console and elevate are not those the world calls practical. Even in the higher walks of science, where the mind enlarges to the scope of Newton's and Kepler's great discoveries, the demonstrated truth is not the whole truth, nor the best truth. As Professor Everett, of Harvard, has finely said in a recent work: "Science only gives us hints of what, by a higher method, we come to know. The astronomer tells us he has swept the heavens with his telescope and found no God." But "the eye of the soul"

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outsweeps the telescope, and finds, not only in the heavens, but everywhere, the presence that is eternal. The reverent soul, seeking for the power that makes for righteousness, will not find it set down in scientific formula. I hold it to be the true office of culture—if I may use that much-derided word—to stimulate the higher intellectual faculties; to give the mind something of that perfection which is found in finely tuned instruments that need only to be touched to give back noble and responsive melody. There is a music that has

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never been named; and yet so deep a meaning has it, that the very stars keep time to its celestial rhythm.

There 's not the smallest orb which thou
 behold'st,
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cher-
 ubins;
Such harmony is in immortal souls.

The dwellers in the Kingdom of Light have a steadfast love for things that cannot be computed, nor reckoned, nor measured. In the daily papers you may read the latest quotations of stocks and bonds, but once upon a time a

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little band of listeners heard the words, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?" and went away with a lesson that Wall Street has yet to learn.

And now you are scornfully asking: "Do you expect men to earn money by following these shadowy and intangible sentiments, which, however noble, are not yet current at the store and market? We must eat, though poetry and art and music perish from the earth." Yes, so it would seem, but *only* seem. I cannot tell *why*, but I am sure that he who

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remembers that something divine is mixed in him with the clay, will find the way open for both the divine and the earthly. You will not starve for following the Light. But I beg of you to remember that this is not a question of incomes and profits. The things I plead for are not set down in ledgers. How hard to think of the unselfish and the ultimate, instead of the personal and immediate. Even unto Jesus they came and inquired, "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" It is not strange, then, that we do not give

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up personal advantage here. But in the Kingdom of Light, in the life I am saying we ought to lead, nothing can be taken from us that can be compared with what we shall receive.

It is quite likely we may be poor, though I am afraid we shall not be, for in the twentieth century no man is safe from sudden wealth; but a worse calamity might befall us than poverty. St. Francis of Assisi, as Renan has said, was, next to Jesus, the sweetest soul that ever walked this earth, and he condemned himself to hunger and

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raggs. I do not advise you to follow him through the lonely forest, and into the shaded glen where the birds used to welcome him to be their friend and companion; but I do most assuredly think it better to live as he did, on bread and water and the cresses that grow by the mountain spring, than to give up the glory and joys of the higher life. In the Kingdom of Light there are friendships of inestimable value; friendships that are rest unto the body, and solace to the soul that is troubled. When Socrates was condemned, how promptly

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his spirit rose to meet the decree of the judges, as he told them of the felicity he should find in the change that would give him the opportunity of listening to the enchanting converse of Orpheus and Musæus and Hesiod and Homer.

Such companionship is ours, through the instrumentality of books. Here, even in this Western land, the worthies of every age will come to our firesides; will travel with us on the distant journey; will abide with us wherever our lot may be cast. And the smaller the

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orbit in which we move, the more contracted the scale of our personal relations, the more valuable and the more needful are those sweet relationships which James Martineau so aptly calls "the friendships of history." In a strain of unrivalled elevation of thought and purity of language, he says:

He that cannot leave his workshop or his village, let him have his passport to other centuries, and find communion in a distant age; it will enable him to look up into those silent faces that cannot deceive, and take the hand of solemn guidance that will never mislead or betray. The ground-plot of a man's own destiny may be closely shut in, and

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the cottage of his rest small; but if the story of this Old World be not quite strange to him—if he can find his way through its vanished cities to hear the pleadings of justice or watch the worship of the gods; if he can visit the battle-fields where the infant life of nations has been baptised in blood; if he can steal into the prisons where the lonely martyrs have waited for their death; if he can walk in the garden or beneath the porch where the lovers of wisdom discourse, or be a guest at the banquet where the wine of high converse passes around; if the experience of his own country and the struggles that consecrate the very soil beneath his feet are no secret to him; if he can listen to Latimer at Paul's Cross, and tend the wounded Hampden in the woods at Chalgrove, and gaze, as upon familiar faces, at the portraits

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of More and Bacon, of Vane and Cromwell, of Owen, Fox, and Baxter—he consciously belongs to a grander life than could be given by territorial possession; he venerates an ancestry auguster than a race of kings; and is richer in the sources of character than any prince or monarch.

Some there are, no doubt, who believe that intellectual culture does not make men better or happier, and that the conscience and moral faculties are set apart from merely mental attributes. But surely you have not accepted such a false and narrow view. Unless colleges are a foolish and expensive

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luxury; unless civilisation is worthless; unless the centuries that have witnessed the upward stride of humanity have been wasted; unless the savage, chattering incantations to his fetich, is a nobler product of the race than a Milton, a Wilberforce, an Emerson, or a Lowell, then heart and mind, morality and education, *do* go together in true and loyal companionship. The trouble of to-day, as I have tried to show, is not that we have too much culture, but too much bending of the knee to purely material results; too much

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worship of the big and not enough of the great.

It is the fate of most of us to work either with hand or brain; but even in this short life a successfully conducted bank, or a bridge that you have built, or a lawsuit you have won, have in themselves little of special significance or value. Very common men have done all these things. When I hear the glorification of the last twenty years, of the fields subdued, the roads rebuilt, the fortunes accumulated, the factories started, I say to myself: "All these are good,

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but not so good that we should make ourselves hoarse with huzzas, or that we should suppose for a moment they belong to the higher order of achievements." Sometimes, too, when I hear the noisy clamour over some great difficulty that has been conquered, I think of James Wolfe under the walls of Quebec, repeating sadly those lines of Gray's *Elegy*:

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of
 pow'r,
And all that beauty, all that wealth
 e'er gave,
Await alike th' inevitable hour:
The paths of glory lead but to the
 grave.

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And I think also how he turned to his officers with that pathetic prevision of the death that was to come to-morrow on the Heights of Abraham and said, "I would rather have written that poem than to take Quebec." And he was right.

Indeed, if we but knew it, the citadel that crowns the mountain's brow—nay, the mountains themselves, ancient, rugged, motionless,—are but toys compared with the silent, invisible, but eternal structure of God's greatest handiwork, the mind.

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I pray you remember there is, if we but search for it, something ennobling in every vocation ; in every enterprise which engages the efforts of man. Do you think Michael Angelo reared the dome, and painted those immortal frescoes, simply because he had a contract to do so? Was the soldier who died at Marathon or Gettysburg thinking of the wages the state had promised him? Be assured that, whatever fate may befall us, nothing so bad can come as to sink into that wretched existence where everything is for-

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gotten but the profit of the hour: the food, the raiment, the handful of silver, the ribbon to wear on the coat. It is but an old story I am telling; but I console myself with the reflection that it cannot be told too often, and only by telling is it kept fresh in the memory and in the heart. The world will go on buying and selling, hoping and fearing, loving and hating, and we shall be in the throng; but in God's name let us not turn away from the Light, nor from the Kingdom that is in the midst of the Light.

In every street shadows are

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walking who were once brave, hopeful and confident. Nay! they are not shadows, but ghosts, dead years ago, in everything but the mere physical portion of existence. They go through the regular operations of trade and traffic, the office, and the court; but they are not living men. They are but bones and skeletons rattling along in a melancholy routine, which has in it neither life nor the spirit of life. It is a sad picture, but saddest because it is true. They knew what happy days were, when they walked in pleasant paths and

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felt in their hearts the freshness of spring. But contact with the world was too much for them. Hesitation and doubt drove out loyalty and faith. They listened to the voice of worldly wisdom as Othello listened to Iago, and the end of the story is,

Put out the light, and then—put out the light.

The dwellers in the Kingdom of which I am speaking are hostages to art and letters, to high aims and noble destinies. They may forget, they may be false, but if some are not faithful, truth and liberty and

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the best of civilisation will be lost, or in danger of being lost. In every ship that sails there must be some to stay by the craft; some to speak the word of cheer; some to soothe the fears of the timorous and affrighted. When Paul was journeying to Italy on that memorable voyage which changed the destinies of the world, the mariners were frightened as the storm came on, and were casting the boats over to seek safety, they knew not whither; but Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, "Except these abide in

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the ship, ye cannot be saved."

It is because I believe so strongly in the saving power of the intellectual life upon the institutions of society, and upon the welfare of individuals, that I plead so earnestly for it. The fortunes of science, art, literature, and government are indissolubly linked with it. The centres and shrines of the most potent influences are not the seats of commerce and capital. The village of Concord, where Emerson, Hawthorne, Alcott, and Thoreau lived, was, in their day, and will long continue

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to be a greater force in this nation than New York and Chicago added to each other. Let us rest in the assured faith that, whoever may *seem* to rule, the thinker is, and always will be, the master.

Those of you who have read Auerbach's great novel remember the motto from Goethe on the title-page,—

On every height there lies repose.

Rest!—how eagerly we seek it! How sweet it is when we are tired of the fret and worry of life! But remember, I pray you, that it

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dwells above the level, in the serene element that reaches to the infinities. Only there is heard the music of the choir invisible; only there can we truly know the rest, the peace, and the joy of those who dwell in the Kingdom of Light.

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